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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of 11 issues of a newsletter providing information on current child advocacy initiatives and accomplishments. Each issue describes one local or state child advocacy program or initiative and its accomplishments, highlighting National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) member initiatives that have resulted in concrete outcomes positively affecting children. The following articles were featured for months in 2002: (1) "Advocates Tap Nationwide Network to Protect Children in Working Poor Families" (January); (2) "Advocacy and Organizing Pay Off Big for San Francisco's Early Care and Education Workforce" (February); (3) "Child Advocates Lead the Way in Integrating Child Welfare and Substance Abuse Services" (March); (4) "Child Advocates Innovate: Making Lemonade Out of Stadiums" (April); (5) "Legislation Provides a New Option for Relatives Caring for Another's Child" (May); (6) "Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Child Advocates Create a State Commission on the Quality of Foster Care" (July); (7) "Changing Assumptions Has Healthy Result for Maine's Children" (August); (8) "Rhode Island Legislation Guarantees Child Care Funds to Needy Families" (September); (9) "Advocates Achieve Historic Victory in Public School Funding and Accountability" (October); (10) "Child Advocates Improve Parity in Insurance Coverage for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment" (November); and (11) "Advocates Rally the Troops To Increase Early Learning Opportunities for Kids" (December). (KB)

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Child Advocates: Making a Difference, 2002.

Bryan Goodman, Editor

National Association of Child Advocates
Washington, DC

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A Publication of the National Association of Child Advocates

Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Advocates Tap Nationwide Network To Protect Children In Working Poor Families

A clock began ticking in 1997 when most states were required to rewrite their welfare laws to implement federal block grants under the 1996 welfare reform law. However, a handful of states, including Vermont, were allowed to complete their own experiments in welfare reform through a waiver before implementing the new law. Thus in 2000, when Vermont legislators had to craft a law to meet federal guidelines, child advocates could learn from both their waiver and the experience of other states how best to protect children under the new law. Vermont Children's Forum (VCF), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA), used this opportunity to advocate for policies that its colleagues in other states had identified as important for kids.

Working closely with legislators, VCF was successful in getting several key provisions. It obtained language in the purpose section of the state welfare legislation that one of the purposes of aid is to protect children by providing for their immediate basic needs, including food, housing and clothing.

The law provided for a program evaluation to assess the impact of welfare reform on children–allowing VCF and other advocacy organizations to monitor the impact on children and seek changes when necessary. The law also included specific requirements that parents are allowed to find appropriate child care before they begin work, better ensuring the wellbeing of children during the transition. Because of this legislation, working poor families are not forced to put their children in inadequate child care to meet the welfare-to-work requirements.

While a clock ticked for many state welfare programs, Vermont had the benefit of a federal waiver, which gave Vermont a chance to experiment with programs and learn from the experiences of other states in crafting welfare legislation.

What Is the Reach Up Program?

"Reach Up" is a part of Vermont's welfare-to-work program. The "Reach Up" program provides a wide-range of services to meet the needs of working parents leaving welfare, with the eventual goal being self-sufficiency. The program provides education, job training, work experience, support services and job development to parents receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The services are provided through an individualized case management process.

Working With Advocates and Legislators

As Vermont policymakers began drafting legislation on how the state would support efforts to move people from welfare to work, it became clear to VCF that parents would need certain safeguards to better ensure their success in securing and maintaining stable employment. To accomplish this, members of VCF looked outside of Vermont for ideas on how child advocates in other states had protected children and families with similar welfare legislation.

Examples were available within NACA's network. Citizens for Missouri's Children, another NACA member, had secured protections in Missouri's welfare system to protect parents who could not find adequate child care. Additionally, NACA's Arkansas member, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, had succeeded in getting welfare legislation that required the state to hire an outside evaluator to assess how welfare reform was affecting children and families.

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The resulting assessments provided Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families with objective information to show state legislators when additional changes were needed. VCF was able to use the successes in these states, among others, to help craft a family-friendly piece of legislation for Vermont.

The next step for VCF was working with other advocacy organizations to identify key Vermont legislators with whom the organization would need to work closely. The organization formed a coalition with attorneys from Vermont Legal Aid, the Vermont Low-Income Advocacy Council (among other groups) and with state employees to work with the Vermont legislature in writing welfare reform legislation.

The coalition met regularly with key legislators on the House Health and Welfare Committee overseeing the drafting of the legislation. The vice-chair of the committee, who oversaw the drafting, was a professor in the University of Vermont School of Social Work and understood well the challenges of parents leaving the welfare system for work and the safety nets those parents need.

Vermont's child advocates would also have to work with other legislators, some of whom straddled the fence on these issues important to working families. Members of VCF and the other advocates in the coalition attended every committee meeting and legislative session that addressed the welfare bill. The advocates met one-on-one with legislators and told them of the importance of adding positive legislative language to ensure that working parents had the basics for self-sufficiency.

Time was of the essence for Vermont child advocates. Many legislators who were proponents of compassionate welfare reform were being targeted because of their votes on an unrelated civil union law granting domestic partnership status rights to gay couples. State polls showed that the passage of the controversial measure would ensure the ouster of many state legislators in the upcoming 2000 election. Many would be replaced by legislators who would be reluctant to place the kind of safeguards in the welfare bill voted in by the current legislature.

VCF quickly invited working poor mothers to testify in committee hearings. Experts were brought in to convince legislators teetering on the fence. Then the process shifted to old-fashioned negotiations. VCF initially pushed for parents to be able to turn down anything but quality child care. Some legislators were uncomfortable with this request, pushing instead for "adequate child care," but finally compromising on "appropriate child care."

"Thanks to NACA and its network, we were able to achieve significant accomplishments for children."

— Sheila Reed
Vermont Children's Forum

Vermont Children's Forum Gets Results

After a hard fought effort to convince Vermont policy makers of the need for safeguards, VCF and its coalition scored a final victory. In May of 2000, state legislators passed a bill that included the needed safety net for children and families, better ensuring the success of parents moving from welfare to work.

The law stated the reason for the "Reach Up" program: "To protect children by providing for their immediate basic needs, including food, housing and clothing." It also required case management services for parents. This included caseworkers informing parents moving to work of all of the benefits for which they qualified, such as appropriate child care as determined by the parents in conjunction with the state agency overseeing child care. The new law gave the parents an exemption if they could not find licensed child care. It also exempted parents who deemed, with the state, that available licensed child care was not appropriate.

The new legislation called for an evaluation of the "Reach Up" program every three years to determine the wellbeing of children who participated in the program. The evaluation looks closely at the case management system and how effectively it helps families meet the goals of the "Reach Up" program.

VCF's accomplishments show the importance of experience and information sharing within NACA's network. Additionally, VCF demonstrated that careful planning and maintaining solid relationships with policymakers and other advocates can accomplish a great deal for working parents and children who would otherwise be ignored in the haste of developing a massive welfare law to meet federal requirements. Thanks to the work of Vermont Children's Forum and its coalition, working poor parents in Vermont will now have the essentials to move successfully from welfare to work.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Advocacy and Organizing Pay Off Big for San Francisco's Early Care and Education Workforce

The link between child care quality and child outcomes is indisputable. And as child advocates know, a critical ingredient in the recipe for high quality child care is adequate compensation rates for child care providers. During the late 1990s, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, set out to address the low compensation and high turnover rates of child care providers in San Francisco by leading a multi-year campaign to secure more public funding for child care workers. Despite an unparalleled period of economic growth, child care providers – *caregivers of the future* – were earning on average barely $8/hour, or about $16,640 annually, in a city where average monthly rent for a 2-bedroom apartment was over $2,500, and the annual child care staff turnover rate hovered around 30 percent.

Higher child care wages attract a well-trained, better educated workforce and help reduce staff turnover rates. Having stable, trained, and educated caregivers is a vital part of child care quality. Child care providers with more education and training provide more stimulating and supportive care, engage children in more complex play and creative activities, and provide greater social and intellectual stimulation. Likewise, loss of contact with any caregiver is stressful for a child. Children in child care programs with high staff turnover rates tend to be both more aggressive and withdrawn. Thus, higher wages are vital to a child's social and emotional development, not to mention school readiness.

With three years of sustained advocacy, organizing, policy and budget efforts, Coleman Advocates and its colleagues in San Francisco instigated a major coup. As a result of their crusade, the City and County of San Francisco dramatically increased its ongoing investment in early childhood programs and the child care workforce, including two innovative publicly-funded child care wage supplement programs. In 1999, San Francisco C.A.R.E.S. (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability) was created, and building upon that momentum, W.A.G.E.S. Plus (Wage Augmentation Grants for Entry-Level Staff) was established in 2000. The programs together currently total over $8 million annually in local and state funding.

"Coleman Advocates and their colleagues in San Francisco secured public funding for two child care provider wage supplement programs, together currently totaling over $8 million annually."

Good Old-Fashioned Organizing – Inside and Outside

San Francisco had a number of elements in place from which to build a more politically potent and mobilized early childhood constituency. First, it was one of 19 cities nationwide selected as part of the Starting Points Initiative, a comprehensive, citywide policy and planning vehicle for families with young children. Oversight for Starting Points was vested in a community-based monitoring group, the Early Childhood Interagency Council (ECIC). The ECIC represented a credible group of 24 key early childhood stakeholders and an effective means of building consensus on policy and budget priorities — from inside local government — affecting families with young children. Coleman Advocates' Executive Director, Margaret Brodkin, has served on this body for several years, playing an indispensable role in shaping policy priorities and articulating winnable budget initiatives. In a groundbreaking roundtable strategy session involving these and other stakeholders in December 1998, Coleman fashioned strong consensus on key early childhood policy and budget priorities – with compensation and benefits for child care providers identified as the number one issue. All that was left to do was to convince decision-makers of the need to allocate necessary resources.

Although most of San Francisco's city supervisors were initially supportive of the campaign, many leaders, including the mayor, were reluctant to use public funds to subsidize child care workers' wages and salaries. In fact, although the advocates requested $1.5 million, the original allocation in the city budget was barely 10% of that original request. Coleman Advocates discovered that while there was no lobby against the initiative they were fighting for, there were competing priorities.

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According to Joe Wilson, Associate Director of Coleman Advocates, the way leaders were won over represented a coming of age for San Francisco's child care field. The mobilization efforts led by Coleman Advocates united groups that shared a common stake in the quality of early care and education offered in the city: child care center directors and teachers, family child care providers, parents, educators, faith-based and other community groups – groups that together had little experience with the political process. These groups came to understand that change would come about only through persistent political activity. Through concentrated leadership development cultivated by ongoing trainings and support by Coleman Advocates, this collective group of advocates was transformed into a persuasive and powerful voice at the forefront of the campaign.

Coleman Advocates strongly believed that success would come about by empowering the leadership existing within the child care community, and thus set out to turn a nearly invisible employment sector into a potent political force. In rebuilding the infrastructure of the child care provider associations and parent organizations, Coleman Advocates and its colleagues discovered a wealth of untapped resources and energies. For instance, while fighting for San Francisco CARES, Coleman Advocates, in partnership with a citywide child care coalition, helped orchestrate a grassroots postcard and media campaign that bombarded City Hall with over 10,000 postcards, criticizing the mayor for not prioritizing the city's children and urging the city supervisors to find money needed for the program in the budget. In a stunning development on the eve of the passage of the City budget, the Board of Supervisors announced that the mayor had "found" an additional $1 million to fund the CARES program. At that point, it was truly understood that the child care field had arrived as an active player in city politics.

As part of the overall strategy, Coleman sponsored several annual community mobilization events, including a Speak Up for Kids Day – a legislative open house and civic engagement exercise that enables city residents to meet with their local representatives about issues important to children and families – and the Baby Brigade – an event which allows hundreds of parents, child care providers, and toddlers to flood City Hall and appeal to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to invest more in child care for working families. At the 2000 Baby Brigade, San Francisco's mayor announced the $4.1 million WAGES-Plus initiative after Coleman Advocates facilitated a working group to develop another wage initiative for child care providers.

What is San Francisco CARES?

"San Francisco CARES" promotes staff retention and stability by awarding stipends or bonuses of up to $5000 for child care staff, both at centers and family day care homes, who continue their education and remain in the field. The program was originally funded at $1.15 million annually, but has grown to $4 million overall, from both state and local sources. It now reaches more than 1,100 child care professionals, a vital part of the potent early childhood organizing base which Coleman continues to help mobilize, support, and cultivate. The child care professionals receiving these stipends constitute the Child Development Corps. Coleman facilitates regular advocacy and organizing trainings for this group.

What is WAGES Plus?

WAGES Plus is another city initiative aimed at bolstering child care quality by providing direct wage support to child care centers. The city created the fund to subsidize wages for providers at centers whose enrollment includes at least 25% low-income children. WAGES Plus grants awarded to qualifying centers are used to raise the wages of the lowest-paid staff, such as entry-level aides and assistants, to a minimum of $9 per hour. Teacher and director salaries are raised a commensurate amount to maintain appropriate differentials depending on education levels, length of service, and so forth. Centers wishing to participate in the WAGES program must agree to raise the lowest paid teachers' salaries to a pre-determined average wage level for each staff classification. Successful centers then receive the WAGES grant and use the funds to further raise staff salaries. The WAGES Plus program was funded at $4.1 million in 2000 and $3.35 million for 2001. In FY 2002-2003, San Francisco will launch a similar initiative for family child care providers, to creatively augment income to stabilize these unique community-based small businesses to support working families needing quality child care.

Conclusion

Taken together, San Francisco CARES and WAGES Plus have provided stipends and wage increases to nearly 1,500 child care professionals. Turnover among the child care workforce has been reduced, and the number of child care providers pursuing professional development has increased significantly. Furthermore, these child care professionals represent a tremendous potential organizing base of people, each with a concrete "pocketbook" motivation to get involved and remain engaged.

Clearly the inside-outside strategy of consensus-building on early childhood policy priorities and coalition-building and mobilizing of hundreds of child care professionals and parents realized impressive concrete benefits, and the strategy succeeded in reallocating an astounding level of local dollars to craft an early childhood investment portfolio virtually unmatched by any city of comparable size in the country.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Lead the Way in Integrating Child Welfare and Substance Abuse Services

NACA members, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) and Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), are leaders in a statewide crusade to improve treatment resources for Maryland parents struggling with substance abuse. Their remarkable success has helped to secure the passage of landmark legislation integrating substance abuse and child welfare services, as well as to dramatically increase the substance abuse treatment resources available.

"When we looked at our state's child welfare services," explains Jann Jackson, ACY Executive Director, "we saw a glaring gap in terms of accessing substance abuse treatment. Parents with addiction weren't getting treatment services in a timely manner, or they weren't getting services which responded to their needs as parents. In a lot of cases, they just weren't getting substance abuse treatment at all."

Children whose parents have untreated addictions are, in the words of a noted Columbia University study, "the most vulnerable and endangered individuals in America." That study, headed by former U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Joseph Califano, found that the U.S. spends about $20 billion per year on foster care for the children of substance abusers, while substance abuse treatment for the parents is typically underfunded, not consistently available, and not well coordinated with child welfare services. With the federal Child Protection/Alcohol and Drug Partnership Act now proposed to address this important challenge, the groundbreaking work of Maryland child advocates offers crucial lessons.

The legislation, which placed substance abuse specialists in local child protective services offices, won an incredible unanimous passage in both the House and the Senate.

Building a Coalition

To reach the goal of integrating state child welfare and substance abuse services, an effective, targeted statewide coalition was crucial. ACY and MARFY are both multi-issue child advocacy organizations, with child welfare only one of the several issues each addresses. The two groups increase their impact, therefore, through leadership in the statewide Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children ("Coalition"), founded in 1997 and currently comprised of seventeen organizations dedicated to improving the state's child welfare system.

While the Coalition provides a strong, coordinated voice among advocates for an improved child welfare system, it was only the first step in reaching out to a broader group of concerned groups and individuals. "We saw right away that advocates with a child welfare perspective couldn't solve this problem alone," explains Diane Banchiere, who served as ACY's Child Welfare Director and the Coalition's Staff Director as the group developed its plan. "We began reaching out to the substance abuse treatment community, inviting administrators, direct service providers, and, later, service recipients to our Coalition meetings."

The Coalition also made good use of their larger child advocacy network, the hundreds of member groups comprising Maryland Children's Action Network (MD CAN). MD CAN is the umbrella group for seven issue-specific coalitions, including (in addition to the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children) coalitions focused on income supports, early childhood, education, health, juvenile justice, and youth development. ACY currently serves as the MD CAN host agency, while MARFY's Jim McComb is the co-chair of the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children.

Each year, MD CAN chooses five priority goals, based upon presentations by its issue-specific coalitions. Thanks to a panel presentation by the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children — including the powerful testimony of a mother whose children were placed in foster care while she waited for scarce substance abuse treatment — the goal of integrated services was embraced as a top MD CAN priority beginning in 1998.

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Winning the support of legislators

With a broad coalition ready to move forward, the group next turned to documenting the problem and comparing proposed solutions. For this, they took advantage of a growing body of research on substance abuse and child welfare.

Armed with solid research and compelling testimony, the coalition was able to quickly attract potential sponsors within the legislature. They reached out to a bipartisan group of key state senators and delegates, who agreed to work with them to develop targeted legislation.

> "Maryland legislators are coming to realize: when they are contacted by MD CAN, or by an MD CAN member, they are being approached by a veritable army."
> – Jim McComb

A key factor in the group's ultimate success was the strong alliance between MD CAN and the Speaker of the Maryland House, developed through years of effective MD CAN lobbying. Recognizing the moral and political strength of MD CAN's statewide network, the Speaker pledged that MD CAN's priorities were his priorities. Of the Speaker's ten official legislative priorities for FY 2000, three — including the integration of substance abuse and child welfare services — came straight from the MD CAN top priority list.

Developing Targeted Legislation

The group's strategy of gaining legislative support prior to developing the actual bill text proved as efficient as it was strategic. Sympathetic legislators linked the Coalition with the state's legislative services office, assigning a bill writer to work directly with the Coalition staff.

"From our Coalition meetings, and the insights we'd gained from the substance abuse treatment community," explains Banchiere, "we realized it wouldn't be enough just to train child welfare workers in substance abuse issues. Parents with substance abuse issues need immediate access to a trained substance abuse service provider, with direct links to appropriate treatment programs."

Accordingly, the bill drafted, The Integration of Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Services Act of 2000, proposed to create and fund a statewide network of substance abuse specialists, each employed by the state substance abuse treatment agency, but permanently assigned to a local child protective services office. The legislation, including funding authorized at up to $16 million, also provided for cross-training of substance abuse and child welfare workers, the development of a protocol for substance abuse screening and treatment referral in child welfare cases, and new targeted treatment resources.

To lobby for the bill's passage, MARFY and ACY continued to coordinate efforts, drawing on the wider MD CAN network. That comprehensive push, combined with the sound appeal of a well-researched and clearly needed bill, helped win an incredible unanimous House and Senate passage.

Implementing the New Legislation

Despite the apparent victory, the struggle was far from over. "Don't think your job is done when you get legislation passed," warns Banchiere. "Getting it implemented is ten times harder."

Filling the newly created substance abuse treatment slots has proven a major challenge. According to McComb, the number of new positions created, combined with generally low salaries in the substance abuse treatment field, has made it difficult to attract enough qualified candidates. Yet, with the Coalition monitoring compliance, the program is slowly moving toward full capacity.

The push toward adequate funding also requires constant vigilance. Since the Act's funding is authorized, but not mandated, it must be appropriated annually. Each year since the legislation was passed, the Coalition has lobbied both for full funding of the Act and for expanded drug treatment funding. At least partly in response, the Maryland state budget for substance abuse treatment has grown from $74 million in FY 2000 to $122 million in FY 2002. Despite extremely tight budget conditions this year, funding for substance abuse treatment appears likely to continue to increase (although probably more modestly) in FY 2003.

Implementation at the program level, as two distinct bureaucracies forge a new cooperative relationship, is another ongoing Coalition priority. Anticipating the challenge, the group acted proactively from the start. First, they successfully included provisions in the Act that mandated the appointment of a committee of experts to oversee implementation; then, Coalition members volunteered and were appointed by the Governor to serve on the committee. Because representatives of ACY and MARFY, as well as their advocacy partners from the drug treatment community, serve on the implementation committee, they have a powerful ongoing role in program development.

A Strategy for Success

Perhaps the key factor in the successful passage of the new legislation was the combined working relationship of ACY, MARFY, and the hundreds of organizational members of the Maryland Children's Action Network (MD CAN). As explained by MARFY's Jim McComb, "Maryland legislators are coming to realize: when they are contacted by MD CAN, or by an MD CAN member, they are being approached by a veritable army."

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Innovate: Making Lemonade Out of Stadiums

During the fall of 1999, proposals for new sports stadiums arrived with a bang in the Keystone State. Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, found that the situation provided them with a challenge, and perhaps an opportunity. According to PCCY Executive Director Shelly Yanoff, Philadelphia, like many other urban areas, was struggling to find funding for programs that improved the quality of life for children and families, like good schools, recreation programs, arts enrichment, child care and afterschool programs. As the city's population had grown poorer, the demand for services had grown while its tax base had shrunk. Yet the city seemed poised to support programs for big people and big interests – like commercial developments and sports stadiums – even as it lacked adequate supports for the programs that would make major differences for children and families. When the city, along with two major sports teams and the state of Pennsylvania, pledged huge sums of money to support construction of two new sports stadiums in Philadelphia, PCCY decided to use the stadiums as a hook to leverage money for kids' programs. While PCCY did not take a position on the "hot" issue – to build or not to build stadiums – PCCY urged that if the city was going to invest in stadiums for the wealthy to play in, it must also invest in programs to help kids play in their neighborhoods. Although the outcome looked a little different than they anticipated, in the end, PCCY's action gave birth to a $60 million Children's Fund.

Putting things in perspective

During the 1990s, multi-million dollar sports stadiums began to sprout up around the nation's cities. Seen as an investment that would ignite revitalization of urban areas, stadiums became a part of the rhetoric and reality of political campaigns at the federal, state, and local levels. Pennsylvania jumped on the bandwagon and pledged financial support in the form of bonds for stadiums in its metropolitan areas, as did the state's two cities that would benefit – Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. In each of these cities, the local share of the required public investment was substantial. Philadelphia was to undertake a commitment of $400 million dollars over the life of the bonds. For child advocates the size of the commitment for a private non-essential service like stadiums seemed inappropriate and in sharp contrast to the city's ability or willingness to support the schools and neighborhood services that kids and families need.

> In order to get the city's financial support, the two sports teams will each contribute $1 million a year for thirty years to a Children's Fund.

PCCY tries to level the playing field

Long before the idea of stadium construction arose, PCCY had advocated for the creation of a fund to finance "non-mandated" underfunded children's programs throughout the city's schools and neighborhoods. Always looking for new angles to increase resources for children, PCCY explored linking funding for children's programs to events held at the sports stadiums located in the city.

Originally, PCCY organized an effort to have a 50 cent surcharge placed on tickets for and parking at sporting events at the city's stadiums. The message was clear and simple: "While paying to see the teams play in the stadiums, give kids a place to play in their neighborhoods!" PCCY encouraged the City Council to hold hearings on the need for such investment, issued a report on the lack of afterschool programs in the City, wrote op-ed pieces and generally conducted a public awareness campaign about the need to make the city more child- and family-friendly. Both the City Commissioner of Police and the Recreation Commissioner testified about the importance of, and need for, more afterschool programs in the city. But the effort bumped into many technical hurdles that couldn't be overcome.

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Down, but certainly not out, PCCY didn't give up hope that it could successfully convince the city to commit to kids if it was going to commit to stadiums. When the city would not support the surcharge, PCCY remained diligent in delivering the message – *you must invest in kids*.

The stadiums were debated while kids waited

Although PCCY felt strongly that construction of new sports stadiums was not the way the city should be spending scarce public dollars, the opposition was powerful. The Mayor, most of the City Council, and the business community wanted new stadiums to improve the city's image and to bring in more visitors. The building trade unions, a large and politically strong force in Philadelphia, packed City Hall time and again in support of the new construction. PCCY felt that kids' advocates could not compete with the forces lined up in support of the stadiums. PCCY decided that while it could not influence the decision about whether the stadiums were to be built, it could develop a strategy to link increased children's funds to the stadium discussion and decision-making. PCCY's position became strategic – "We are not taking a position on whether public dollars should be spent on stadiums. In fact, we do not think this is a wise choice of scarce funds. But should you spend public dollars so wealthy grown-ups can watch games, you must link that expenditure with improving the chances for low-income kids." The organization broke with many of its traditional allies when it chose not to fight the stadium issue. Said Yanoff, "but we felt we were making a case and seizing an opportunity to make lemonade out of the lemons that we were going to get anyway."

Staying with the sports theme, PCCY's message was clear and simple – Give kids a place to play while the big guys play! Get kids off the sidelines! Help level the playing field for the city's disadvantaged!

Construction of two new sports stadiums in Philadelphia caused quite a stir among the city's residents. It was on everyone's radar screen, particularly so when the discussion turned to where the stadiums would be constructed. Everyone had an opinion about where they should go. PCCY took advantage of the media attention that the issue was receiving and successfully pushed their take on the stadium debate to the forefront. They targeted local newspapers, placed several op-ed pieces, and received editorial endorsement from the city's major newspapers. The idea of giving kids a place to play resonated with the public. PCCY created and distributed bright yellow placards arguing their case – "As negotiations between the city and the teams go on, our kids are on the sidelines. They don't have to be!" The literature was distributed at public hearings, to public officials, and to civic groups. Again, they were persistent with the message, debunking the sports teams' assertion that PCCY's involvement was a deal-breaker with the city. "If that's the deal breaker, then we should say 'no deal,'" was PCCY's response.

Stadium construction emerged as a hot election issue. PCCY asked candidates about their stance on children's funding and the sports stadiums in the city's mayoral election, turning the issue into a test for candidates' support of kids overall. Although the issue generally received no commitment from the mayoral candidates, the idea gained more and more momentum, and continued to resurface as negotiations between the city and the sports teams continued. When the new mayor came to office, PCCY wouldn't let die the issue of creating a dedicated children's fund. It worked with a newly-elected councilwoman who introduced a resolution urging the city to withhold financial support for the new stadiums unless it was tied to supporting children and families. Although the resolution never came to a vote, the hearings and discussions that ensued paid off. Behind closed doors, the mayor committed to including what was now called the Children's Fund as part of the "must haves" in the negotiation with the teams.

PCCY wins big for children and youth!

The result – the two sports teams committed to contributing $1 million each to a Children's Fund every year for thirty years. The new fund, to begin later this year when the new stadiums open, will finance many of the programs vital to children's growth and development – afterschool, child care, recreation, arts enrichment, and library programs – that were traditionally under-funded in the city budget. Because of the complexities of the law, the Fund will not be overseen by the city, but by a local foundation.

Conclusion

There's more than one way to get the results you want. PCCY successfully championed yet another cause for children and youth in Philadelphia, proving that flexibility, opportunism, and persistence play important roles in making a better world for kids.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Legislation Provides a New Option for Relatives Caring for Another's Child

Kinship caregivers in New Jersey now have a new legal remedy for assuming permanent care of relative's children, thanks in large part to NACA member The Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ). The new option, called "Kinship Legal Guardianship," became effective in January 2002, with ACNJ providing leadership in proposing, developing, and drafting the new legislation. It provides kinship caregivers with the legal authority they need to raise relative children to adulthood, as well as access to needed financial and service supports.

"We asked kinship caregivers to tell us what challenges they faced; the biggest challenge was that they didn't like having to choose between adoption and custody—which was understandable, as neither was designed for their situation. Custody was traditionally a weak remedy, offering little protection against later custody challenges, and little access to financial supports. Adoption was uncomfortable for many families, because it could alienate a struggling birth parent—who, after all, was a relative too," says Cecilia Zalkind, the Executive Director for the Association for Children of New Jersey.

Working with the families, and studying remedies from other states, ACNJ set a goal of getting a law passed which would create a legal remedy secure enough to safeguard a child's permanence, yet flexible enough to allow appropriate birthparent involvement. Equally important, because so many of the families were struggling financially, it would provide access to meaningful financial supports.

Understanding the Challenge

When parents cannot care for their children due to death, illness, drug or alcohol addiction, incarceration, or other serious problems, care by a relative is often the first and best choice for the children.

> "ACNJ took the lead in working with various groups to forge a consensus in addressing the permanency needs of kinship families."

In recent years, more and more children are living with a relative, most likely a grandparent. A 1999 report found that New Jersey had 6%, or 107,287, of its 1.8 million children living with their grandparents. Nationally, between 1990 and 1998, the number of children being cared for solely by grandparents increased by 51.5%.

Kinship care families face many special challenges. Grandparent caregivers are 60% more likely to be living in poverty than are grandparents without the full-time care giving responsibilities involved with raising a child. Additionally, children being raised by grandparents and other relatives often have special needs such as low birth weight, attention-deficit hyperactivity, learning disabilities, HIV/AIDS, severe emotional scars, or special mental health needs. Lack of legal options can add to family stress. In a 1995 report, ACNJ documented that many kin caregivers had only temporary custody orders which did not provide placement permanency for the children. Many relatives taking care of children had no legal arrangements at all, making it difficult to enroll the children in school or obtain basic health care.

Children who are in the protective custody of the state, with a relative designated as foster parent, also need to transition to permanency under the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which, as of 1997, has required states to set permanency goals within a year of the child's entering into state custody.

ACNJ Develops a Legislative Solution

In 1999, as New Jersey debated state laws to implement the Adoption and Safe Families Act, advocates urged legislators to address the needs of kinship families. "Permanency was a big focus in that discussion." ACNJ's legislative analyst, Keri Ocasio, said, "Many policy makers were beginning to realize that these relative placements needed legal protection and assistance."

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At the request of the President of the New Jersey Senate, ACNJ took the lead in working with various groups to forge a consensus in addressing the permanency needs of kinship families. Over the next year and a half, ACNJ met with grandparent networks, AIDS/HIV caregiver networks, foster parent support groups, adoptive parent support groups, and AARP, to develop legislation which would provide needed permanency, as well as financial and service supports.

"In the fall of 2001, the governor signed the Kinship Legal Guardianship legislation into law. It requires kinship caregivers to commit to raising the child to adulthood, but provides them with the legal protections and financial supports they need to fulfill that role."

The legislative coalition began by holding an all-day strategic planning session to assess the needs of kinship care families, and funding for child care subsidies was determined to be a top priority. One member of the coalition was the staffer for the Kinship Navigator Program, a state program established to help kinship caregivers navigate the various programs and benefits available to them. The strategic planning session set forth such a compelling case for providing child care subsidies that the staffer for the Kinship Navigator Program recommended that the administration include the necessary funding in the next legislative budget proposal. ACNJ advocated for the subsidies and they were enacted as part of the state's budget.

In 2001, the President of the Senate became the acting governor. He made the Kinship Legal Guardianship bill part of his platform and increased the line item in what was now his own proposed state budget. ACNJ continued to meet with his staff and give feedback on drafts of the bill. As the bill went through the legislative process, ACNJ sent out emergency action alerts to advocates, and e-mails to legislators. On the last day of the session, the guardianship bill was passed. Ocasio says the saving grace throughout the whole process was that, "the need for permanency for these children was well-recognized."

ACNJ sent more e-mails to ask the governor to sign the bill, but he conditionally vetoed it to strengthen its provisions. One of the things the governor wanted to do was to provide funding for three more judges to handle any increase in caseload caused by the kinship care bill. The legislature had adopted a moratorium on any bills requiring increased funding, because the state had gone over its budget. ACNJ sent out another alert urging passage of the bill with the necessary funding. Even after the bill was signed, ACNJ continued its advocacy to educate kinship caregivers of its passage, so they would learn of the advantages of this new legal option.

Kinship Caregivers Receive Legal Status and Child Care Subsidies

In the fall of 2001, the governor signed the Kinship Legal Guardianship legislation into law. It requires kinship caregivers to commit to raising the child to adulthood, but provides them with the legal protections and some of the financial supports they need to fulfill that role.

The parents reserve their rights to visitation and to consent to adoption, and may have a duty to provide child support if able to do so. The child's right to visit with siblings and/or extended family can be preserved, and the guardianship does not interfere with the child's rights to inherit or receive governmental benefits where the right derives from the parent.

The legislation also created financial supports for eligible caregivers, in the amount of $250 per month per child (a level between the supports available through welfare and the payments available to foster parents). These funds are available, subject to certain limitations, both to families in which the child was placed by a child protection agency and to families not involved with child protective services (CPS). For non-CPS families to qualify, they must earn no more than 150% of poverty level and must apply through the kinship navigator program. There is funding to provide stipends to up to 12,000 families—4,000 within the CPS system and 8,000 outside it.

Ocasio says of the new law, "It is a good beginning. It still falls short in many areas, but it's a foot in the door." One concern is that the families headed by kinship caregivers have complex needs, such as housing and physical and mental health care, which are not met by the current law. ACNJ is also carefully watching the impact of federal and state changes to the TANF program on kinship care families.

While challenges remain, the passage of the Kinship Guardianship Law marks real progress in support of kinship families. As one grandmother said to Zalkind, "This law finally gives us respect."

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Child Advocates Create a State Commission on the Quality of Foster Care

In May of 2002, after four years of intense struggle, National Association of Child Advocates member Statewide Youth Advocacy, Inc. (SYA) helped to create a voice for some of New York's most vulnerable children and their families. Faced with a foster care system severely lacking in oversight, SYA worked to draft and pass legislation creating a State Commission on the Quality of Foster Care, an independent, investigative body within the executive branch responsible for receiving, investigating, and reporting complaints and concerns from individuals involved in the foster care system. Thanks to SYA, for the first time, this vulnerable population will have the power to speak out and actually be heard.

A System Crying out for Help

The need for the Commission arose directly from crisis. In 1995, Governor George E. Pataki sought and received a waiver from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to create the Family and Children's Services Block Grant, which capped—and severely cut—the funds the state could devote to child welfare service programs. "The block grant was a perverse kind of financing mechanism," explains Elie Ward, SYA's Executive Director. "It was a massive cut of resources."

At the same time, SYA was receiving disturbing reports from foster care providers, children's law guardians, and biological families. Children were staying in foster care too long, experiencing too many placements, and, in many cases, re-entering foster care after unsuccessful returns home. Caseworkers were carrying huge caseloads, and biological families were denied needed services, while the state child welfare agency failed to take effective action. As a comprehensive investigation conducted by two state Assembly Committees concluded: "The bottom line is that the systems set up to serve as a safety net for our children are failing. The length of time children spend in care is increasing and the quality of services they receive is decreasing."

> **"The Commission finally gives a voice to children, families, and staff in the foster care system, empowering them for the first time to express their grievances without fear of retribution."**
> – Elie Ward

Fighting an Uphill Battle

In 1995, SYA met with the Chairs of the Committees on Children and Families in the Assembly and the Senate and with senior administrative staff to devise a way to address problems within the child welfare system. Following this meeting, SYA worked with the Assembly Committees on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation and on Children and Families to hold hearings throughout the state to determine what should be done to improve the quality of services provided by the child welfare system as well as the oversight of these services. At one of the hearings, SYA's Ward emphasized the need for oversight because "it is unrealistic to expect that the system which provides services to children will also be able to investigate, control, and improve itself."

Observing the successes of the Commission on the Quality of Care of the Mentally Ill, an independent entity that receives and investigates complaints from people who work with the mentally ill, SYA spearheaded a movement to create a Commission on the Quality of Foster Care, which would provide the same services for individuals within the foster care system. In 1998, SYA and the Assembly Chair of the Committee on Children and Families drafted legislation that would establish such a commission. SYA prioritized the Commission in its 1998-99 and 1999-2000 editions of New York State Children's Agenda/Budget Project as well as in its report, *Thinking Out of the Box: Building and Funding a Child Welfare System that Actually Serves Children and Families.*

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Even as SYA was working toward its goal, several tragic and well-publicized child deaths within the child welfare system helped attract public attention and concern. Recognizing an opportunity, SYA worked to translate public concern into public action. Using every media opportunity available, SYA worked to explain the need and garner support for the Commission. They pointed out that there was a Commission of Corrections to address complaints of prisoners but no commission that could investigate the grievances of helpless children and families enmeshed in the child welfare system.

> "Successful advocacy means taking advantage of circumstances, no matter how tragic."
> – Elie Ward

SYA also began working its many pre-existing multi-issue coalitions, whose member organizations actively endorsed the creation of the Commission and wrote letters of support. On these coalitions, SYA worked most closely with Citizens' Committee for Children of New York and Westchester Children's Association, NACA's other two member organizations in New York. Additionally, the Council Of Family and Child Caring Agencies, a large trade association representing many private nonprofit foster care and residential service agencies, joined the effort.

Throughout the first four years of effort, the bill repeatedly passed the Assembly, while the more conservative Senate repeatedly rejected the bill. But in the fall of 2001, tragic events turned the tide in favor of SYA. Two children in foster care were killed, one in the district of the Senate Chairman of the Committee on Children and Families. These devastating incidents made tangible the message that SYA had been sending out for four years: a system without oversight is ripe for disaster. It gave SYA advocates a foot in the door to talk to the Chairman and the rest of the Committee, beginning to convince them that the Commission they were proposing could help prevent such tragedies.

Victory after Four Long Years

The final turning point of the four-year battle occurred in February of 2002, when eight girls in a residential program for adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems attacked a female counselor. SYA was finally able to convince formerly reluctant Senators that a peaceable, orderly way to express serious grievances was needed. In this new light, the bill quickly passed through the Senate. The Administration also drew on the recent tragedy to accrue public support, signing the legislation into law in late May, and budgeting $500,000 to cover start-up expenses.

The Next Steps

With both legislative authority and funding now firmly in place, SYA is working with the Administration to devise operational procedures for the Commission. Soon, the governor will appoint (with the Senate's consent) the five members of the Commission, at least three of whom must exhibit expertise in providing for the needs of children in the foster care system. Once the Commission is up and running (projected to occur by December, 2002), SYA plans to issue an alert both on its web site and through its various publications and mailing lists to announce the establishment of the Commission as a means for parents, staff, and children in the foster care system to express their grievances. SYA will also create a palm card, which will include quick facts about the Commission and what it does, as well as its 1-800 number and simple instructions on how to use it. These cards will be distributed at all of SYA's presentations and speaking engagements.

Individuals involved in the foster care system will be able to issue complaints in writing, during interviews, or during on-site visits conducted by the Commission to ensure that the children are receiving adequate care. During its investigation of any complaint, the Commission may visit the program and conduct interviews. Following investigation, the Commission must submit a report describing its findings and recommendations to the Office of Children and Family Services and the foster care program itself. It will also produce an annual report for the governor and legislature describing its work during that year and making suggestions about how to improve the foster care system.

SYA is committed to keeping a close eye on the Commission's operation and activities to ensure that it is working successfully. SYA will pay especially close attention to the annual reports submitted by the Commission and will make sure that these reports are filed. "SYA has a commitment to make sure the Commission works," says Ward. "And if it is not working, the public will know why."

SYA's vision, to give a voice to formerly voiceless children, families, and workers, will finally triumph.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Changing Assumptions Has Healthy Result for Maine's Children

Far too many U.S. children do not receive preventive or acute health care. More than nine million children are uninsured and many insured children are unable to obtain medical attention due to parental work conflicts, adolescent issues or lack of transportation. NACA member organization, the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA), found a way to make health services more accessible to Maine's children by bringing together school-based health centers (SBHCs) and insurers to negotiate a project that would provide reimbursement for insured children.

SBHCs are becoming a workable solution to provide access to health care for children. Many SBHCs are full-service medical facilities and may have physicians' assistants or doctors in schools to provide services including mental health, lab-work, chronic disease management, dental care, and acute and preventive care. SBHCs serve all students—even the uninsured—thus playing a particularly important role in low-income areas. Already, over one million children from a variety of communities and of all ages receive primary preventive and early intervention services in over 1400 SBHCs in 45 states.

Lack of funding presents an obstacle to the maintenance and expansion of SBHCs. Because SBHCs are not usually part of a managed care network, they generally are unable to receive payment even for services to insured children.

Bringing The Players Together

Elinor Goldberg, Executive Director of MCA, became involved in school-based health care because it was a viable way to increase access to care without harming the preexisting health care system. Goldberg first became involved with school-based health care in early 2000, when she was seeking a way to increase access to quality health care for Maine children within the current health care realities. After MCA announced its new initiative, an insurer came to her to voice concern about L.D. 600, a bill before the Maine legislature. If passed, it would have required insurers to cover children who used SBHCs.

At that time, most of Maine's SBHCs did not receive reimbursements from private insurers for services provided to children at SBHCs—even those with insurance. Goldberg knew this bill was unlikely to pass and seeking a legislative mandate might only increase opposition to SBHCs. Insurers feared premiums would rise from simultaneous coverage of SBHC visits and managed care costs. Businesses feared their health benefit costs would increase, leaving employees unable to afford health insurance, ultimately resulting in more uninsured children. Goldberg also realized that if the insurers and the SBHCs could agree on this issue, it would strengthen cooperation between the two groups and create a better working relationship.

"Addressing school-based health issues is a win-win situation for kids, schools, insurance companies and the state of Maine. Kids will be healthier, ready to learn, and we will all benefit."

— Elinor "Ellie" Goldberg

At a hearing on L.D. 600, legislators discussed the results of a review that examined the issues involved in requiring insurers to cover children's SBHC visits. Goldberg requested a study to assess the costs of covering SBHC services that would have been covered if provided in another setting.

Goldberg had originally formed a school-based health council comprised of providers, policy-makers, consultants, school nurses, MCA board members, and the medical association. She then convened the four managed care insurers with the school-based health council and, as a result, negotiation for a non-mandated settlement began. From those successful negotiations came the agreement for this pilot project.

The insurers agreed to reimburse eligible SBHCs for services provided to adolescents they insured without prior primary care provider approval. Therefore, for the next three years, the 20 Maine SBHCs that provide services to adolescents will be treated as approved sites for reimbursement. A very important part of this pilot project is the evaluation, which will be overseen by a steering committee staffed by MCA. Funding is being sought from private foundations for the evaluation. For this project, SBHCs will not be reimbursed for mental health services or for services

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to elementary children. However, mental health services provided to adolescents with other funding will be a part of the comprehensive evaluation.

All Maine credentialed participating SBHCs that wish to participate, serve 12- to 18-year-olds, and can contract with the health plans will be included. Each health center must receive parental authorization for each child to use the health center each school year. Each participating health center must meet the credentialing standards of the health plans, agree to contractual relationships with the health plans, bill all covered services to the health plans, and set guidelines to provide feedback to each child's primary care physician. The health plans will reimburse the SBHC for covered primary care services and will not require prior authorization from the primary care physician.

The school-based health care pilot project has several goals. The main goal is to evaluate whether SBHCs are an effective part of a managed care network in delivering health services to Maine adolescents. The insurance companies should know the costs and benefits of school-based health care coverage before expanding coverage beyond this initial three-year trial period. Other goals of the pilot project are to increase awareness of issues regarding access and quality of children's health in Maine and to increase access to a coordinated health care system for all Maine's children.

Evaluating the Outcomes

Having private insurers agree to finance a three-year project is indeed a win for Maine's children. However, to ensure funding beyond the pilot project, it is especially important for the evaluation component to demonstrate that SBHCs are successful in improving the health of Maine's children and are cost effective. No evaluation like this has ever occurred. The evaluation will assess the costs, benefits, and quality enhancements made by the SBHCs. Outcomes for adolescents attending schools with SBHCs will be compared to the outcomes for a control group of adolescents without SBHCs in their schools.

Three other NACA members also have worked closely with the school-based health care communities in their states to increase children's access to care. Carol Kamin, the Executive Director of Arizona's Children's Action Alliance, sits on an advisory committee that provides political expertise to the local school-based health care coalition and has advocated for the continued funding of SBHCs from the state tobacco tax. Michigan's Children worked closely with its School Community Health Alliance and others to reverse the Governor's decision in 2001 to cut school-based health care funding to help balance the budget. Similarly, Children First for Oregon led a successful fight to reverse a legislative decision to cut school-based health care because of the state budget deficit. This effort led to the formation of a coalition called Healthy Kids Learn Better, which works to strengthen policy and funding and is supportive of the link between health and education—including SBHCs. In each case, the political expertise of the NACA member provided the missing link to protecting state funding for children's access to health care.

Pay-Off for Maine's Youth

The primary outcome of MCA's work is that the private insurers agreed to pay for health services delivered to adolescents at 20 SBHCs in middle and high schools in Maine for three years. This increase in funding will allow the SBHCs to serve more children—both insured and uninsured. While the pilot project will reimburse SBHCs only for insured children, the reimbursement will afford SBHCs the ability to spend other funds on uninsured children. Beyond this immediate coverage, the anticipated long-term goal is that the evaluation and commitment of insurers will result in private health insurers paying for the services provided in all SBHCs in Maine and hopefully on a national level. For example, Maine's biggest insurer also provides insurance in several other states. If the evaluation is successful, a natural start for expanding coverage would be in those sister states.

In addition to the pilot project, another exciting outcome from this endeavor is that organizational ties have been made between SBHC providers and private insurers. As Lisa Belanger from the Maine School-Based Health Care Assembly, the Maine affiliate of the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care, wrote, "The benefits of the partnership that has been forged through [Elinor Goldberg's] convening role has given us a much deeper understanding of the obstacles and limitations faced by Maine insurers.... Ultimately it is the kids who win. Providing students with the access to health care that they need gives us all a reason to feel successful."

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Rhode Island Legislation Guarantees Child Care Funds to Needy Families

Finding and affording child care is one of the greatest challenges faced by low-income parents struggling to support their families. In Rhode Island, however, thousands of low-income families are receiving much-needed subsidies and benefiting from an expanded state child care system, thanks in large part to the efforts of NACA member Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. As a result of the tireless advocacy work of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and a unique collaboration among legislators, state officials, and child advocates, Rhode Island has taken one of the most progressive stances on child care in the country, passing sweeping legislation to provide child care subsidies to all eligible low-income families and improve support for child care in the state. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT served as a voice for children and working families at every step of the legislative process, helping to make quality child care a possibility for the families that need it most.

Putting Child Care on the Agenda

As federal welfare reform was being passed and states were developing their implementation plans, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was working with a coalition of community leaders to set the stage for family-focused welfare policy that would provide the supports needed to move families off welfare and toward independence. They believed that in order for this to happen, families would need, at a bare minimum, three things: jobs, health care, and child care. Without each of these essential components, parents would not be able to maintain employment, placing entire families at risk.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT tirelessly promoted the message that welfare reform would affect children, raising awareness of the link between welfare reform and long-term child outcomes. Through contacts with legislators, coordination of a public engagement campaign, and the publication of a key issue brief, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT brought greater visibility to the consequences of early development and education, helping to convince stakeholders that taking a long-term view of welfare reform would be the wisest state investment.

"Rhode Island KIDS COUNT tirelessly promoted the message that welfare reform would affect children, helping to raise awareness of the link between welfare reform and long-term child outcomes."

Guaranteeing Child Care

A coalition of community leaders worked together to craft Rhode Island's 1997 welfare legislation to implement the 1996 federal welfare reform, thereby creating Rhode Island's Family Independence Program. Former Rhode Island Director of Human Services Christy Ferguson successfully pushed for the inclusion of the child care entitlement in the Program, which states that work requirements for parents making the transition from welfare to work will not apply unless appropriate child care is available. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provided strong support for the Family Independence Program, helping to ensure that the legislation would be publicly supported and passed by state policymakers. The organization also continually focused attention on the critical importance of child care for families making the transition from welfare to work.

The child care entitlement originally guaranteed child care assistance to all working families with incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The income level was eventually increased to 200 and then 225 percent of the federal poverty level. At this current level, all families within the income guidelines are automatically eligible to receive child care subsidies, which they can use toward appropriate care for children up to age 16. Rhode Island is the only state with such a child care entitlement. Unlike most other states, where child care subsidies are not guaranteed and are available to only a fraction of eligible families, the Rhode Island child care initiative ensures that all eligible families are able to receive child care subsidies.

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Rhode Island's inclusion of children up to age 16 also sets it apart from other states, since most states do not provide subsidies for children over the age of 13.

Making the Guarantee Meaningful

Initial passage of the child care entitlement served as a wakeup call for state policymakers and the impetus for further child care legislation. Once the child care entitlement was signed into law, it became clear that there was barely enough child care available to meet the needs of families making the transition from welfare to work, let alone the rest of the state's families needing child care. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT realized that in addition to helping needy families afford child care, the state would also need to increase and expand support for the existing child care system, in order to meet the increased demand that would result from families using their child care subsidies. They continued to deliver the message that supporting child care would result in the greatest gain for children's long-term well-being and that investing in high-quality child care was the best investment the state could make. This advocacy work led to the development of the Starting RIght initiative, which achieved three major changes: 1) increased the reimbursement rates for providers serving families that use subsidies; 2) provided health insurance benefits for child care providers; and 3) supported a new child care wraparound program, similar to Head Start, for children eligible for Head Start but not enrolled. Passage of Starting RIght signaled that the state was serious about not only providing subsidies, but also providing quality child care for all those who needed it.

"As a result of the child care entitlement and Starting RIght, Rhode Island's spending on child care increased from $12 million in 1997 to $60 million in 2002. The number of children benefiting from child care subsidies more than doubled, from 6,000 in 1997 to over 12,000 in 2002."

From Policy to Progress

Once the child care entitlement was passed, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT played a key role in its implementation, an important step in ensuring that the original vision of the child care entitlement was preserved as it was put in place. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's Executive Director, Elizabeth Burke Bryant, co-chaired Implementation Task Forces for both the state welfare legislation, which included the child care entitlement, and the Starting RIght initiative. In this capacity, she was able to build and maintain the support of community members for the reforms, as Rhode Island KIDS COUNT already had a trusted reputation among Rhode Island policymakers. The two Implementation Task Forces brought community advocates and senior state agency staff members together on a regular basis to develop the policies and procedures necessary for effective implementation of the Family Independence Program and the Starting RIght Program. Broad-based support for the programs was critical to ensuring that the child care entitlement was retained.

Conclusion

As a result of the child care entitlement and Starting RIght, Rhode Island's spending on child care increased from $12 million in 1997 to $60 million in 2002. The number of children benefiting from child care subsidies more than doubled, from 6,000 in 1997 to over 12,000 in 2002. The majority of families (67%) who receive child care subsidies are low-income working families who are not receiving welfare cash assistance, which demonstrates the importance of child care assistance in helping low-income families remain off of welfare and in sustained employment. Furthermore, the number of families with working parents enrolled in the state's welfare program has nearly doubled since the program was reformed in 1996.

Rhode Island is currently a national leader in its comprehensive policy stance toward child care assistance for low-income working families. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was instrumental in shaping the discussion about how federal welfare reform would be implemented in Rhode Island in a way that would support the healthy development of children and create a receptive environment for legislation as progressive and inclusive as the child care entitlement and the subsequent Starting RIght initiative. The organization also provided valuable leadership throughout the implementation process, helping to ensure that the state's legislative commitment to helping children and families would be realized through the effective implementation of the new laws. True to form, however, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT believes there is still more that can be done to support children and families in Rhode Island. The task at hand, Bryant notes, is to stay the course. "The real promise of the child care entitlement will be fulfilled only when we can ensure that all of the child care offered... is of the highest quality possible." Clearly, they have taken great strides in that direction.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Advocates Achieve Historic Victory in Public School Funding and Accountability

Over the past decade, the failure of many states to provide equitable public education has surfaced as one of the most challenging issues child advocates have had to confront. Advocates across the nation have fought for years to illuminate growing gaps — both social and academic — between impoverished and affluent school districts due to antiquated funding equations. Such was the case in Maryland when Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY), a member of National Association of Child Advocates, championed a two-year campaign to achieve adequacy and accountability in Maryland school funding. ACY proved that students in Maryland schools receiving more state funding performed better than students whose schools received less funding. More importantly, ACY and its coalition partners successfully argued that all schools — whether in richer or in poorer districts — needed significantly more funding in order to provide even an adequate education.

Victory was won when Maryland's governor signed legislation based on an independent commission's recommendations. This historic event marked the first time a state agreed to school funding reform without litigation being the primary driver of reform. Because of the Commission's recommendations and the hard work of ACY and its partners, the Maryland public school system will receive an additional $1.3 billion in funding per year once the funding levels are fully implemented.

Taking Equity One Step Further

For years, advocates in Maryland lamented the consequences of the state's disproportionate funding of its public schools. Comparing standardized test scores across local areas, advocates learned that students from districts receiving less funding per pupil did not perform as well as students in better-funded districts. ACY and the Maryland Education Coalition (MEC), part of the Maryland Children's Action Network (a statewide advocacy network housed and primarily staffed by ACY), began lobbying for school finance reform in the state.

"Because of ACY's advocacy efforts, Maryland was the first state in the nation to address education funding reform based on adequacy and equity without litigation, successfully obtaining $1.3 billion in education funding per year over six years."

ACY and MEC persuaded the state legislature to create an independent commission to objectively evaluate school funding. The commission, known as the Thornton Commission, concluded, as advocates already knew, that some districts were funded at levels significantly lower than others. Simply put, the school system was funded inequitably. However, ACY realized that the Commission's report alone would not persuade the legislature to alter the school funding structure. ACY also understood that if the debate was framed over equity, concern that the state would end up redistributing existing education funds, or taking funds from one district and giving them to another, would pit school against school and community against community. If the debate focused on increasing funding for some school districts at the expense of others, the public would not support the much-needed reform.

Convinced that their efforts could have a real impact on a range of social and academic outcomes for Maryland's children, ACY and its partners applied a different strategy. They started talking about funding adequacy, or whether Maryland was providing sufficient funds to allow school districts to meet the State's performance standards. With the completion of the Commission's first report, MEC and its partners convinced the legislature to extend the timeline of the Thornton Commission's work so that it could examine Maryland's school systems through lenses of both adequacy and equity.

Thanks to a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, MEC was able to fund an adequacy study by a nationally-known education policy group. This served as a catalyst for the Thornton Commission to begin focusing on adequacy. Both studies found that, although some of Maryland's schools were getting much more money than others, no district received enough to provide an adequate education for their students. Both reports concluded that Maryland was under-funding its public school system by over $1 billion per year. No Maryland public school district, even in the wealthiest communities,

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received sufficient funding to provide students with the quality education they needed.

As ACY successfully delineated the debate over education funding reform, former adversaries became allies. Instead of pitting school against school, all of Maryland's schools now united against the state's fiscally conservative legislators. With new allies, ACY and its partners moved closer to achieving their goal of ensuring that every student, rather than only the neediest, would benefit.

Mapping Out A Multi-Pronged Attack

But ACY and its partners encountered another obstacle. In 2002, declining economic conditions had resulted in diminishing revenues and a budget crisis for the state. General consensus among the legislature was that the Commission's recommendations could never be enacted into law because funds simply did not exist.

ACY co-chaired a legislative coalition to garner the support they needed. This coalition represented numerous groups with diverse opinions who were all able to unite in efforts to increase public school funding. Critical partners included: the ACLU of Maryland, the Maryland State PTA, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Caucus of Black School Board Members, the Maryland State Teachers Association, and the Maryland Association of Boards of Education. The coalition raised awareness about the condition of Maryland's public schools. Its ability to generate letters of support through traditional grass-roots letter-writing, combined with website mobilization, played a big role. The coalition established a website dedicated to informing Maryland's concerned citizens of the ongoing struggle to acquire adequate funding for the state's schools while simultaneously sending out e-mail alerts. The efforts produced thousands of e-mails supporting funding reform that were sent directly to state politicians.

The coalition also used more traditional methods to spread its message. For instance, when the Speaker of the House of Delegates, someone who traditionally had been supportive of ACY's advocacy efforts, stated that it would be fiscally irresponsible to pass the education reform legislation without knowing where the state would get the money, ACY placed a paid ad in the local newspaper. The ad praised the Speaker for everything he had done thus far to support Maryland's children and families, and encouraged him to support the Thornton Commission's recommendations because, according to ACY, he was the only one who could make it happen. The ad got the Speaker's attention, and he worked with ACY and its partners to champion the legislation in the final hours of the session.

"Although some of Maryland's schools were getting much more money than others, none of the schools were getting enough to provide an adequate education for their students."

Continuing to seek the public and policymakers' support, ACY collected data on school funding and students' academic performance by legislative district and provided individualized fact sheets to legislators and their constituents. The fact sheets illustrated the amount of money each jurisdiction currently received and how much each would receive based on the Thornton Commission's recommendations. ACY compiled polling data that demonstrated the public's support for greater spending on education, even if it required raising taxes $100 per person. *The Baltimore Sun* also conducted a poll which yielded similar results.

At the same time, ACY and its partners lobbied the legislators on behalf of families. The advocates, along with concerned parents and students, testified in hearings to the dire need for additional funding for Maryland's schools. Together they argued that additional education legislation or litigation, as was the case in many other states, would not be necessary if the legislature would act on the Commission's recommendations. A final push for education funding reform involved holding a press conference in support of the Thornton Commission's recommendations, highlighting their benefit to all of Maryland's students.

The hard work of ACY and its partners – commissioning studies, organizing a broad based diverse coalition, conducting polls, lobbying, writing editorials, mobilizing and many other necessary steps – paid off big. The Maryland legislature passed legislation based on the Thornton Commission's recommendations which require the state to provide enough new funding to ensure an adequate and equitable education for its children as required by the Maryland State Constitution. The final result – Maryland's public schools will now receive an additional $1.3 billion in education funding per year, to be phased in over a six-year period. The bill also calls for Maryland to target extra resources to those children who need it most: poor, disabled, and those who speak English as a second language. Each local school system must submit a master plan detailing how the funding will be used to eliminate minority achievement gaps and accelerate academic achievement for all students.

Conclusion

ACY knew that only by improving the education offered its children could the state bypass insurmountable future social problems. Advocates know the reality – pay now, or pay later. Because of ACY's leadership, schools in Maryland will now receive sufficient funding to provide their students with the high quality education that they need and deserve in order to become healthy, able, and productive citizens.

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Child Advocates Improve Parity in Insurance Coverage for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment

Health insurance coverage for mental health and substance abuse is not generally considered a children's issue. Advocates seeking to ensure coverage often approach the issue purely from a disabilities perspective. Not so in New Hampshire.

The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, recognized the significance of mental health and substance abuse challenges for children and families. A family member with untreated mental health or substance abuse problems can severely harm the entire family. Framing mental health and substance abuse problems as a children's issue can help destigmatize the issue and make the urgent need for treatment more understandable to legislators and the public.

Beginning in 2001, the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, founder of the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network (NH CAN), worked with a coalition of health care and mental health providers on a two-year-long campaign to pass a mental health parity bill, House Bill 672.

Previously, health insurers in New Hampshire were mandated to cover treatment for eight mental health diagnoses at the same level as for physical illnesses. HB 672 adds three illnesses to this list: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and chronic post-traumatic stress disorder. More importantly, it requires insurers to cover some in- and outpatient drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation. Also, for the first time, insurers must cover services provided by licensed alcohol and drug counselors. HB 672 becomes law on January 1, 2003 and is considered by advocates and citizens alike a major step toward comprehensive mental health and substance abuse parity in New Hampshire.

Because a successful coalition was built by the Children's Alliance, NH CAN and Partners for Parity, parents and children who have eating disorders, chronic post traumatic stress disorder and alcohol and drug problems may now demand health insurance cover at least some treatment.

The Need for Mental Health Parity Legislation

Early intervention for mental health and substance abuse can prevent physical ailments that result from a lack of treatment, as well as the emotional and societal costs of disrupted education, child abuse and neglect, violence and property crime. Yet nearly all private health insurance plans provide less coverage for mental health or addiction treatment than for medical and surgical benefits. In 2001, 83 percent of New Hampshire's children were covered by private health insurance. That number included many of the estimated 25,000 children (between ages 9 and 17) with a diagnosable mental or addiction disorder and some degree of impairment.

Parity legislation requires private insurance plans to provide benefits for the treatment of mental illnesses and alcohol and drug disorders that are as favorable as the minimum benefits provided for physical illnesses. Beyond these requirements, parity laws make an important policy statement: People with mental illness and alcohol and drug problems must be treated the same as those with other medical disorders.

NH CAN Becomes a Power for Parity

NH CAN was founded by Children's Alliance of NH in June 1999 in response to legislators and government officials who said the lack of a unified voice hampered the work of children's advocates. NH CAN is a network of more than 150 child-

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serving organizations and advocacy groups that work collaboratively to improve the health and well-being of all children and youth by driving governmental policy, changing budget priorities, and inspiring community action.

Since January 2000, NH CAN has released an annual children's agenda, its blueprint for action to improve child well-being. That agenda includes legislative priorities for the year. NH CAN then tracks each of its priorities and notifies its members via e-mail when they should speak up to support them.

In early summer of 2000, several NH CAN members created Partners for Parity, a statewide coalition to pursue comprehensive parity legislation. Partners for Parity recognized the potential of NH CAN as a mobilizing force and the persuasive value of framing parity as a children's issue.

NH CAN members agreed. They voted parity onto the Children's Agenda 2001 and, with a legislative committee studying the bill that summer, made parity their top health priority for 2002

A Children's Issue

The Children's Alliance signed on with Partners for Parity and focused on the impact the legislation would have on New Hampshire's most vulnerable children. NH CAN's published Agenda highlighted parity. A steady stream of e-mail alerts from the Children's Alliance informed the network about the impact parity could have and kept advocates informed as the bill crept through the legislature.

Parity had powerful opponents in the insurance lobby and the legislative leadership, but Partners for Parity and the NH CAN developed powerful tools to support their case. They commissioned an actuarial analysis that showed that a comprehensive parity package would cost little. They also brandished a University of New Hampshire survey indicating that 72 percent of New Hampshire adults favored such a bill.

The rest was pure grassroots lobbying. The Children's Alliance issued e-mail alerts that spelled out both for its members and NH CAN members all the information they needed to speak up quickly and easily when it mattered. The e-mails included: how to get involved; what actions needed to be taken and when; the names, e-mail addresses and home telephone numbers of key legislators; and a clear, direct message to deliver.

In late February, a committee sent the bill to the full House of Representatives with a recommendation of "inexpedient to legislate," which meant that it should not be passed. NH CAN and Partners for Parity knew that the parity legislation was in deep trouble; usually, when bills are marked inexpedient to legislate, that ends the legislative process. The Children's Alliance and other partners sent out alerts urging a full-scale phone and e-mail blitz of House members. The afternoon before the vote, parity's opponents in the House asked Partners for Parity and NH CAN to call off their networks. The blitz had forced a compromise. The Children's Alliance sent out an alert that began, "The next time someone tells you that you can't make a difference ..."

"Our role lay not only in mobilizing child advocates to support the bill, but also in reframing the debate to include the needs of children and families."

Remarkably, the committee chairman rose on the House floor the following day to speak against his own committee's recommendation. The bill passed, the Senate put back into the bill what the compromise had removed, the House backed down, and HB 672 was signed into law.

According to Children's Alliance President Ellen Shemitz, "Our role lay not only in mobilizing child advocates to support the bill, but also in reframing the debate to include the needs of children and families. Without child advocates making the issue more accessible to the people and legislators of New Hampshire, HB 672 would have been cast as an unjustified burden to the health insurance industry for the benefit of a few, and subsequently prone to more scrutiny and resistance."

The Road Ahead

Advocates did not get the comprehensive mental health and substance abuse parity plan they initially sought, but HB 672 is a milestone in the quest for parity. A key factor in the bill's passage was the Alliance's role in framing it as a children's issue. Because a successful coalition was built by the Children's Alliance, NH CAN and Partners for Parity, parents and children who have eating disorders, chronic post traumatic stress disorder and alcohol and drug problems may now demand health insurance cover at least some treatment. This is a positive step in what Shemitz calls the "long road toward destigmatizing treatment for mental illness and substance abuse."

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Child Advocates

Making a Difference

Advocates Rally the Troops to Increase Early Learning Opportunities For Kids

In fall 2001, the Colorado Children's Campaign (CCC), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, discovered that the state had not drawn down $2 million of its allocation of federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds. Colorado, like many states, was facing a growing budget deficit and was unable to pull together its required matching funds. When the CCC learned that this pot of money, earmarked for Colorado, was just waiting for the taking, it helped pass legislation that enabled $2 million of matching funds from a private organization to be used to draw down the federal funds and successfully advocated to ensure that the full $4 million would be invested in high-quality early education opportunities for low-income Colorado children. Through separate legislation, the CCC also helped secure 1,000 new preschool slots that would increase the number of low-income and high-risk children receiving high-quality early care and education experiences. The CCC helped to pass these two key bills in the worst budget year Colorado has ever experienced. These successes will ensure that more of Colorado's most vulnerable children receive the jump start they need to succeed in school.

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Public/Private Partnership Key to Making Good Things Happen for Kids

By 2001, educators and advocates in Colorado were increasingly aware of a growing decline in test scores for elementary school students, raising concerns that many children were not getting the high-quality early education experiences necessary to prepare them for school. When staff from the CCC and Educare Colorado, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving children's development and early learning experiences, began discussing the impact of the state's budget problems on the availability of high quality early education opportunities for kids, Educare staff proposed to the CCC that they work together to develop a school readiness bill. Educare would provide $2 million in matching funds to enable the state to draw down an additional $2 million of CCDBG funds. The CCC would undertake a legislative campaign that would allow these private matching funds to draw down the federal money and target the resulting $4 million towards high-quality early education for low-income children. The CCC's research found that using private matching funds was feasible as long as the private donations all came from one source. The two organizations then developed their strategy: the CCC would advocate that the state use those funds to improve and expand early childhood programs, especially those in areas with low-performing elementary schools, while Educare would work with the Colorado Department of Human Services to iron out the process of drawing down the funds and implementation.

"According to Bruce Atchison, Vice President of the Colorado Children's Campaign, Educare Colorado turned to the CCC for its legislative expertise and capacity to mobilize communities in support of early education efforts."

The CCC drafted legislation to create this public/private partnership. The legislation, HB'02 1297, proposed that communities with poor performing elementary schools that were also members of the Consolidated Child Care Pilots (a program established in 1997 by the CCC to provide high-quality early childhood opportunities in eighteen low-income communities serving 30 of Colorado's 63 counties) could apply for three-year grants to fund school readiness programs in local child care centers and homes. Advocates believed that the Consolidated Child Care Pilot sites would be the best place to test the school readiness legislation because they have authority to seek waivers to any state rule, regulation or law that would allow it to shape the school readiness programs more effectively.

With $4 million in child care funding at stake, advocates began searching for legislative champions to support

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this innovative funding approach. The CCC enlisted the help of a member of the Kids' Caucus and long-time champion for children's issues, easing the legislation's journey through a Republican-dominated legislature. Though the CCC had a well-respected legislator on their team and the dollars were not state general funds, the CCC still faced strong opposition from legislators who believed that the care of young children is solely a family responsibility.

All Hands on Deck

Once they knew what was needed, the Colorado Children's Campaign took a multi-pronged approach to getting the legislation passed. First, they enlisted their It's About Kids network, a grassroots initiative that works to build public will for children's issues across the state by enlisting the help of unusual allies. The unlikely allies – ranging from a cattle rancher in one rural community to a district attorney in another – participate in and lead their communities in promoting kid-friendly legislation and programs. Altogether the network includes 5,000 people in ten communities. Once the grassroots networks learned via email alerts of the new school readiness legislation, they hit the phones, targeting swing vote legislators and encouraging them to support the much-needed program. The legislators were bombarded with phone calls – so much so that they asked the CCC to get the word out to the network that they would support the legislation, and to please stop calling!

Simultaneously, the CCC reached out to legislators through the Kids' Caucus, a bipartisan group of legislators hand-picked by the CCC with strong track records of leading legislative efforts for children. The CCC armed the Kids' Caucus with data collected by the Colorado Preschool Program, a program serving 3- to 5-year-olds identified as being at risk for school failure, which showed that by third grade, children who had been enrolled in the program had higher scores on reading, writing and math compared to their peers. Because Kids' Caucus members were able to provide solid evidence to fellow legislators that school readiness programs worked, they were able to develop bipartisan support for the legislation.

While all this was going on, the CCC galvanized the early care and education community in support of the legislation. The advocates held community forums to discuss their views on early care and education with parents and providers, who in turn encouraged their representatives to support HB'02 1297. Additionally, the CCC organized briefings by the pilot sites to educate community members about the importance of high-quality early education experiences to children's school success and how the proposed school readiness program would help improve the quality and availability of programs within their community. In addition to their own lobbying efforts, the CCC also enlisted the help of lobbyists from the Colorado Early Childhood Summit, a group of statewide leaders on early care and education who work together to develop strategies for implementing public policy. HB'02 1297, the legislation to target the new $4 million in funding for school readiness, was passed in its original format.

"Thanks to the efforts of Colorado Children's Campaign and Educare Colorado, 4,800 children annually will receive better quality early education, and 1,000 more children will enter the Colorado Preschool Program."

The CCC Makes Great Headway

At the same time, another bill on early education, HB'02 1185, was being debated. HB'02 1185 would have allowed communities to use Colorado Preschool Program funds to serve infants, toddlers and 3-year-olds who were previously ineligible, and would add 1,000 desperately needed preschool slots to decrease the 4,500 child waiting list. A prominent leader in the House, personally opposed to this legislation because he felt that the government should not provide any funding for infant and toddler care, asked the Speaker of the House to kill the bill. The Speaker assigned the bill to both the Health, Education, Welfare and Institutions Committee (HEWI) and the Military Affairs Committee, believing that even if the bill made it through the HEWI Committee, it would be killed in the Military Affairs Committee because of its lack of relevance to the committee. The bill passed in the HEWI Committee with a close vote and went on to the Military Affairs Committee where it was passed thanks to the efforts of It's About Kids and the Kids' Caucus.

In the end, the 1,000 new child care slots in HB'02 1185 were passed as part of the school finance act and the language was changed so that the program funds could now be used to serve eligible at-risk 3-year-olds as well as 4- and 5-year-olds.

Conclusion

The relationships that the Colorado Children's Campaign has formed with legislators and grassroots organizations have proven to be indispensable. Thanks to the efforts of the CCC and the private matching funds provided by Educare Colorado, the state drew down an additional $2 million from its federal allocation and will use the additional funds to enhance the early learning experiences of Colorado's low-income children. The funds will provide school readiness programs in 468 preschool and child care classrooms serving 4,800 children annually, and increase the enrollment of the Colorado Preschool Program by 1,000 to serve a total of nearly 12,000 children, helping them get the start they need to succeed in school, and in life.

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